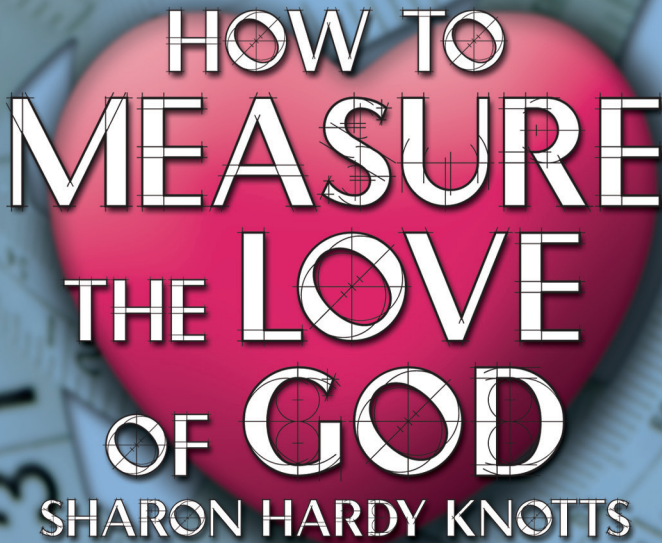


FAITH IS ACTION

The background of the entire page is a heart-shaped opening in a textured, brown fabric. Through this opening, a night sky is visible, filled with stars and a bright, multi-pointed star in the center. Below the star, a sunset or sunrise is visible, with a silhouette of a church and people gathered in front of it. The overall mood is spiritual and inspirational.

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HOW TO MEASURE THE LOVE OF GOD



HOW TO MEASURE THE LOVE OF GOD

SHARON HARDY KNOTTS

The cross is the central emblem of our faith. Whenever N.T. writers wanted to express the love of God, they pointed to the cross. When they wanted to express the power of God, they pointed to the empty tomb, because without an empty tomb, the cross means nothing. Jesus would be just like any other martyr, but He died and *rose again*. And because He lives, we have abundant life now and eternal life to come.

Our message from Ephesians 3 is a very simple, but powerful message. Because the Bible says *the preaching of the cross is the power of God, and God has chosen the foolishness of preaching*, and even foolish vessels to do the preaching, to save them that believe (Ref. 1 Cor. 1:18-29).

THE GREAT PAULINE PRAYER

In Ephesians 3:14-16, Paul prayed: *“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord*

Jesus Christ of whom the whole family in heaven and of earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.”

“That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge...” (vv.7-19).

To be rooted and grounded in love, we have to have the root of love planted in our hearts, and the root will bring forth the fruit, but only if we remain grounded in the love of Christ.

COMPREHEND & EXPERIENCE

Paul said two things about this love: First, that we would comprehend what is the breadth (an old

English word meaning how broad or wide something is, so we will use width). He wants us to comprehend the dimensions of God's love: what is the *width* of God's love, what is the *length* of God's love, what is the *depth* of God's love, and what is the *height* of God's love. And secondly, to know the love of God which passes knowledge. Perhaps this sounds like an oxymoron: How can you know something that passes knowledge?

The Greek word for *know* means *to know by experience*. It's not just an intellectual knowledge, but experiential. This grammatical structure is a present participle and denotes *ongoing action*. In other words, you will always be experiencing and growing in the love of God. Just about the time you think you have reached the saturation point when God's love overwhelms you and you are baptized in love, guess what? There is more! When you think you have come to know the very heights, depths, width and length of God's love, there is more!

It's like in the Olympics when the javelin and discus throwers throw, and the place is marked where they land: "Wow, he just did 50 feet," and everybody claps. But on his second attempt he throws 52 feet. Then someone else throws for 55 feet; then another throws it 60 feet. Everyone thinks: *Surely that is the limit of possibility*. Then somebody throws it 70 feet, and that's kind of the way God wants us to know His love; that when we think we know it all, there's still

more to know. When we first met Jesus, we were embarking on a journey that will take us to our dying breath, and till then, there will be more and more and more we can learn about Jesus and His great love!

WE NEED A MEASURING TOOL

How can we comprehend the width, the length, the depth, and the height of the love of God? These speak of measurements, and in order to measure something, you have to have a tool such as a ruler, a tape measure, or or gauge by which to measure. So if we are going to measure the love of God, we need a tool. If you want to know something about God, where should you go? *To the Bible, to the Word of God*. In this book is everything God wants us to know about Him. Then we need to find something in His Word that will serve as a measuring device to measure the love of God. So if we had to choose one verse in the Bible that exemplifies the love of God, what most famous Scripture in the Bible best describes the love of God? "**John 3:16.**"

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This is our tape measure, and we will start with the width:

HOW WIDE IS THE LOVE OF GOD?

"For God so loved the world..." In Jesus, God reached down His arms of love and wrapped them around *the whole wide world*. It doesn't mat-

ter what you are: Red, yellow, black or white; from the Eskimos in the Arctic Pole to the Aborigines in Australia, God loves this whole world, and He is not willing that this world should perish. God made the world beautiful, and when He created it, He said, *“It is good.”* When He put man on this world, He said, *“It is very good,”* but sin came in and corrupted the earth. 1 John 5:9: *“The whole world lies in wickedness.”* The whole world is in darkness, because sin has corrupted it. *“And all that is in the world is the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life”* (1Jn. 2:16). But God still loves the world... so much that He wrapped His arms around the world and said through the prophet Isaiah, *“Look unto Me all you ends of the earth and be saved.”* No matter where anyone is today, God is saving people. He is saving Buddhists in China, Hindus in India, Muslims in the Middle East, atheists in the former Soviet Union, in prisons and in all the miry places of the earth, because God’s love is wide enough to encompass all who will look to Him.

2 Peter 3:9: *“God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the saving knowledge of His Son Jesus Christ, and come to repentance.”* God is not willing that one sinner go out into eternity without Christ; He is not willing that one person should go to Hell, because God knows how terrible Hell is. Jesus said that God made Hell for the devil and his angels, *not for people.* He didn’t make it for human beings;

yet the Bible says that Hell has enlarged itself seven times to receive the souls of human beings that are going out into eternity without Jesus Christ, and they don’t have to, because God loved the world so much He wrapped His arms around the whole world.

Paul said in 1Timothy 2:4: *“God would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.”* There is not one person that God does not want to save, and He proved His love when He stretched Jesus out on the cross. He stretched Him wide and He hung Him publicly before the whole world. Jesus said: *“I am the Way, I am the Truth, I am the Life”* (John 14:6).

Someone may say, “Well, that sounds very exclusive to me.” Yes, it is exclusive in that there is no other way but Jesus. He said, *“I am the door to Heaven, and no one comes to the Father God but by Me.”* (JN 10:7). It is *exclusive* in that there is only one way, Jesus Christ. *But it is all-inclusive* in that He said, *“Who-soever will, let him come,”* because the love of God is wide enough to reach the whole world.

THE LENGTH OF GOD’S LOVE

“...That He gave His only Begotten Son...” In order to measure the length of God’s love, we must ask: *To what degree would God go to prove His love?* Perhaps you have been in a relationship that just wasn’t going good, but because you loved that person dearly, you tried desperately to work it out. You said, “I’m

going to hold on a little longer. I'm going to go a little further. I'm going to walk another mile to give him another chance. I'm going to try one more time. I'm going to go to the *enth degree*." But when things never got better, somewhere along the line you said, "That's it. That's enough. I've had it. I'm out of here."

But God didn't do that! Over and over God looked down on sinful man and said, "I'm going to give them another chance. I'm going to call them one more time. I'm going to send My Spirit once more to deal with their hearts and show My mercy one more time."

To what degree and to what length did God go to show His love to this world that He loves so much? He sent Jesus Christ, His only Begotten Son, *from Heaven down*. You've got to understand where Jesus came from. You can't appreciate how much He loves you if you don't know where He came from. He left the splendor of glory. He left the celestial city of God where myriad choirs of holy angels sing: "*Alleluia, alleluia*." He left the jeweled throne where living creatures bow down night and day, 24/7, saying, "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty*." He left that place of absolute perfect beauty that the human eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor has it entered into the hearts and imaginations of men the things that God has prepared for us in that place (1 Cor. 2:9). Yes, we talk about the streets of gold. We talk about New Jerusalem the celestial city. We talk about the glory that shall

be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18). Jesus *left* that place.

John 1:14: "*And the Word became flesh and dwelled among us*." Among whom? Sinners, God-haters, murderers, blasphemers, filthy people! But for these Jesus came *all the way from Heaven down to express how much God loves us*. He left the splendor and the glory. He laid aside His rights as God. He laid aside His deity and His majesty, and came from Heaven down and showed to what length God would go to prove His love for us.

In Philippians 2:6-8, Paul described Jesus' emptying out of His glory to become the suffering servant and Savior. "*Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant...*" (God became a **servant**. This was the degree, the length that God went to show mankind His love.)

"And was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself;"

Think about this: He already laid aside His glory to become a human, and furthermore to become a servant! Yet He *humbled* himself further, and "*became obedient unto death*." The length is getting greater; the degree of God's love is growing, because He not only humbled Himself unto obedience unto death, but "*even the death of the cross*." The Bible says in Deut.: 21:23: "*Cursed is he who hangs on a tree*", and Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus *despised the shame of the cross*. But He endured the shame;

He endured its mockery. He endured its ridicule. He endured becoming accursed. That was *the degree* that God was willing to go to show how much He loves us.

Jesus was willing to come down from Heaven's glory to a lowly, humble manger in Bethlehem; then to live in the ordinary little town of Nazareth and work 30 years in a carpenter's shop. He was then willing for three years to walk the highways and byways of Jerusalem to Galilee amongst the poor, healing the sick, the crippled, cleansing the lepers, giving sight to the blind, bringing hope to the hopeless, and delivering all who were oppressed of the devil. The children of Israel were beaten down and oppressed. "*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: Who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with him*" (Acts 10:38).

He was willing to go wherever the sick were to heal them. He was willing to go anywhere the lost were to save them. One day He got on a boat and went to the seashore of the Gadarenes to one man who was so demon possessed and tormented in his mind, he ripped off his clothes and cut himself. Chains couldn't even hold him, but God went to such a degree that He sent Jesus to that one man and set him free (Mk. 5:1-20). That's how long and how far the arm of God's love is able to reach.

THE OLIVE PRESS

For over three years Jesus did nothing but good, healing their sick,

ministering to their lost and broken people, and what did they do to Him? They rejected Him. His suffering began in the Garden of Agony, Gethsemane. The word Gethsemane means "*olive press*." It refers to how they garnered the oil from the olives. They didn't have modern equipment, but they used a huge stone weighing several tons to press the oil from the olives. First they put them in baskets on top of each other, and then the huge weight on them. It would crush the olives, and the oil would run out.

In Gethsemane, Jesus was in the oil press and in *great agony*. He said, "*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death*." (Mt. 26:38). He was stating that He could have died in Gethsemane just from what He was going through in His soul and His emotions! The sorrow that He was feeling and experiencing was enough to kill Him! In fact, Luke 22:44 tells us that He was in such agony, "*His sweat came as drops of blood falling to the ground*." This actually is a medical condition called *hemaditrosis*. It only occurs in extreme stress, but if the body is under enough stress, it can cause little capillaries to burst and then the blood comes through the pores of the skin with the sweat.

He didn't die in Gethsemane, because God sent angels to strengthen Him, because He had to go to the cross. He wasn't going to die anywhere but on the cross. Galatians 3:13 says that He became a curse for us to deliver us from the curse, by hanging on the cursed tree. From Gethsemane He went to Gabbatha at

Pilate's whipping post. If you saw the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, you know how greatly He suffered. I have heard people say that they don't see how it could have been as bad as the movie depicted or He would have died. How could He have survived such a beating and loss of blood?

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus was human in every respect just like we are, and He had a human body that felt, bled, and hurt just like ours. The difference is: *Jesus was without sin*. Hebrews 4:15 says that He was tempted in all points like we are, *but without sin*. He was like Adam was before Adam sinned. Romans 5:12 tells us that it was by Adam's sin that *death entered the world*. Adam and Eve were not supposed to know death, but when they sinned, *death entered the world through the sin of Adam*, and *passed upon all men!* The mortality rate for humans is 100%.

But because Jesus was *without sin*, because Jesus was *sinless*, **death didn't have a claim on Him!** Only when He went to Golgotha, when He hung on the cross and took upon Himself our transgressions, and bore in His own body our sins to the tree, and became our sin-bearer, could death lay a claim on Him! So Jesus went from Gethsemane to Gabbatha to Golgotha to prove how far God's love would go to save the world.

THE DEPTH OF GOD'S LOVE

"...*That whosoever believes in Him...*" God so loves the murderer, the drunkard, the junkie, the dealer, the prostitute, the homosexual, the

lesbian, the child molester, the thief, the liar, the blasphemer— it doesn't matter how deep in sin someone has fallen, His love will reach down to the lowest pit and lift him out. No matter how deep in sin you have fallen, I came to tell you, *God's love is deeper still!* No matter how far you may have run from Him; maybe you knew the Lord once, and you walked with God, but now you've gone away from Him. You are like that son that Jesus talked about in Luke 15.

A man had two sons, and he loved them both dearly, but one day his younger son said, "Father, give me my part of the inheritance," and the father did. Shortly after, the young man left home and went into a *far country*. There he had a partying good time. *He lived riotously:* This means he went to parties; he went to bars; he went to night clubs, and did everything he wanted. He had many girlfriends and friends, and everything his heart desired. He had good time after good time, but Jesus said that one day his good times ran out. He had spent all of his money, and guess what? He didn't have any more girlfriends or boyfriends or any friends. He had nobody; he had nothing, and he found himself in a pigsty and hungry, because a famine had come to that land.

When you go away from the Father's house, I don't care where you go; you can go to a tropical island or the most wonderful spot on the face of this earth, but a famine is going to come into your life. When this young man's money ran out, he had to get a

job. I'm sure that being raised a son of privilege, and being Jewish, he didn't know anything about feeding pigs! This was the absolute humiliation. Even Gentiles didn't like to feed pigs, much less Jews! One thing that always strikes me no matter how many times I read this story: Jesus said, "*And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat...*" In other words, he was so hungry that he wasn't picky anymore. He would have gladly eaten the husks after the pigs got done chewing on them, "*but no man gave to him*" (vs. 15). He was so far down that he didn't even have the husks that the pigs had to eat.

But this story has a good ending, because Jesus said, "*When he came to himself...*" One day he woke up and came to his senses and said, "My God, how did I ever get here? How could I have gotten so far away from the way I was raised? I was raised in church. I was raised to serve God. I used to be a prince in my father's house. I had Sabbath clothes; I went to church; I worshipped God and rejoiced with the people of God. I had peace, and when I went home, I laid down in a nice comfortable bed and ate at a table with good food. Now I am in a pigsty eating pigs' leftovers! Even the servants in my father's house have more to eat than I do!"

Another thing that strikes me is his spiritual awakening, for he said, "*Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son. Just make me a servant in your house.*"

He acknowledged his sin against God, because all sin is against God.

The father went every day and looked down the long road to see if his son might return home that day, and one day he saw him coming. He was tattered, ragged, and filthy, his hair matted with the mud of the pigsty. He had no shoes on his feet and looked like he hadn't seen a good meal in a long time. But when the father saw him, he ran with his arms open wide, and kissed him and said, "*My son was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, but now he is found!*"

The son answered just what he said he would say; "*I'm not worthy to be called your son,*" but his father said, "*Hush! hush, I don't want to hear that.*" He told his servants, "*Go get the finest robe and shoes, and put a ring on his finger. We're going to have a party like we've never had a party, because my son that was dead, is alive!*"

This story often focuses on the prodigal son, but what Jesus was highlighting is **the Father's love!**

AMAZING GRACE

Recently, hearing a Christian group singing *Amazing Grace*, I sang along with them. Next thing I knew, they sang "*...that saved a soul like me.*" I said, "*A soul? A soul like me?*" They changed *wretch* to *soul*! The man who wrote that song was John Newton, who had been a captain of a slave ship. He went to Africa and loaded those poor men and women onto his ship where they were jammed in together and took

them on the perilous journey over the Atlantic Ocean. The conditions were so horrible that many died on the way. Those who survived were sold on the slave block. He was the captain of one of those ships. I would say that's a pretty rank sinner. But one day he was convicted of his sins and realized what a despicable sinner he was. God saved him, and he went from being a captain of a slave ship to a preacher of the Gospel. He wrote *Amazing Grace*, and I think he knew what he was talking about. He didn't say, "*Who saved a soul like me.*" He said, "*Who saved a wretch like me,*" because when you fall into the deepest pit of sin, you become a **wretch**, and I can prove it with Scripture.

Paul wrote Romans 7 about the plight of the man under the bondage and dominion of sin and who wanted to be free. But he said, "The good I want to do, I can't do, and the evil that I swore that I'd never do, I do again and again." This depicts the addict who says, "I'll never use drugs again," and tomorrow he's out there doing it. That one that says, "I'm never going to drink another drop of alcohol," but there he goes getting drunk again. That one that says, "This is the last trick I'm going to turn, and I'm going to get out of prostitution." That one that says, "I'm coming out of homosexuality."

They want out, but the evil they don't want to do, the thing that they hate, they fall back into. How did Paul put it? "*O wretched man that I am. Who shall save me from the body*

of this death?" (v.25). But there is one more verse: "*Thanks be unto God through Jesus Christ.*"

John Newton loved John 3:16; it was his flagship verse. He especially loved the phrase, "*Whosoever believes on him...*" Newton explained: "Because if Jesus would have said, '*If John Newton believes on him,*' I would have thought He meant someone else also named John Newton. But when He said '**Whosoever,**' I knew He meant even **me!**'"

No matter how far in sin you have fallen, God's love will reach you. David was God's chosen king, His anointed one of whom He said, "*I have found in him a man after my own heart,*" but he fell into adultery and murder, the worst sins in the eyes of men. In Psalm 40:2-3, after God delivered him, he wrote: "*He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay...*"

It's been said that *sin will take you further than you want to go, and keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.* Because you can't play with sin and win. You will lose every time. So I ask you, *How much are you willing to pay for your sin?*

Jesus said, "*What shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For if you gain the whole world, and lose your soul, what has it profited you?*" (Matt. 16:26). If you are thinking: *I just can't give up this woman, I just can't give up this man, I just can't give up this drug, I just can't give up this lifestyle and the money it brings*—Is that the price you are will-

ing to pay for your eternal soul? But I'm here to tell you that if you think it's helpless and hopeless, if you think that you've gone too far in sin, the love of God is deeper still!

SHOULD NOT PERISH

We declared up front that John 3:16 is the greatest Scripture on love in the Bible, but we cannot overlook the fact that this greatest Scripture on love still has a warning of judgment: "*Should not perish...*" Jesus alluded to the fact that some will perish; that if you choose not to believe, make no mistake, you will perish. You've got to make a choice. God said, "I have set before you life and good, and death and evil.... blessing and cursing: Choose life that you may live" (Deut, 30:15,19). It's either sin or salvation. It's either life or death. There is no in-between. It's either going to be your way or God's way: "*Choose you this day whom you will serve...*" (Josh. 29:15).

One thing God will never do is violate your right to choose, even if it were better for you if He did! God will let you choose to the degree that He will let you go to Hell, if that's what you choose. So if you choose to go your way, God will let you go. The father in Jesus' story didn't try to stop that young man from leaving. He let him go, and thank God, he got back! Thank God, some of you will get back to God, and God is knocking at somebody's heart's door today. Make the choice to open up and let Him in.

"*Be not deceived, God is not mocked...*" (Gal.6:7). Paul said in Rom. 7:11: "*Sin deceived me, and slew me!*" He also warned in 1 Cor. 6:9: "*Know you not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind.*" (*Effeminate* refers to male homosexuals who play the passive or feminine role. *Abusers of themselves with mankind* refers to male homosexuals who play the dominant role, or in a lesbian relationship, the one who takes the man's role. This is a clear warning against same sex relationships.)

"*Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God*" (vs.10). They might belong to the First Church of the Politically Correct down here, but they will not inherit the kingdom of God.

"*And such were some of you: but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*" (vs.11). The Holy Ghost didn't say, "**but**" three times just to fill up the page. The Word of God is very explicit, and when He said, "but, but, but," He was making a point. He could have just said it once, and it would have the same meaning. He wanted to drive home a point and to make it emphatic: "*You were, but now you're not!*" You were in the miry clay, **but now** you're lifted out. You were a rank sinner, **but now** you are washed in the blood of Jesus. You

were vile and unclean, **but now** you are sanctified. You were a wretch, **but now** His amazing grace has saved you. This declares a person cannot claim to be saved and still be actively committing these sins: “You were—but now you’re not!”

God spoke in Isaiah 1:18: “*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*” The love of God can reach down into the deepest pit to save the vilest sinner. Hebrews 7:25: “*Wherefore He is able also to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him*” (Christ Jesus). He’s able to save to the utmost, to the *enth* degree. I like to say it this way: *From the gutter-most to the uttermost!*

HOW HIGH IS GOD'S LOVE?

“...But have eternal life.” Let me say that this makes me mighty happy! Jesus said in John the 14:2-3, “*In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also.*” That’s how high the love of God is! It can lift you out of the miry clay all the way up to the Father’s house in Heaven where Jesus is preparing a place for us!

Apostle Paul said in 2 Cor. 4:7 that right now we are in a house of clay (earthen vessels). He likened our

bodies to a tabernacle of skin (2 Cor. 5:1), because the tabernacle in the Old Testament was made of goat skins. We are living in an earthly tabernacle, and no matter what we do, we can’t stop it from decaying. God told Adam when he sinned: “*From dust you are, and to dust you shall return*” (Gen. 3:19). Most of the dust in our houses is under our beds, and while we are sleeping at night, we’re going back to dust, because our skin cells are falling off while we sleep. As we age, the renewal of our bodies slows down until death overtakes them. Paul said, “*The outward man is perishing, but the inner man is renewed day by day*” (2 Cor. 4:16). This is why I said up front that God is more interested in your inner man. The outer man, no matter what you do, is perishing. You can get a brow lift, a face lift, get your eyelids done, your jowls raised up, and everything else lifted up, but the law of gravity is pulling everything down to the earth and the grave. As we age, we say that things are going south. Well, this aging body of mine might be going south, but my soul and spirit are going north! Paul said, “We who are in this body are groaning within ourselves,” because we want to be free from this body; we are waiting for the redemption of our bodies (Ref. Rom.8:23).

This physical body often gives me a hard time, but thank God, I only have it for a little while. It’s a temporary house, but I’ve got a body, I’ve got an eternal house in Heaven not made by human hands! (2 Cor. 5:1).

It is beautiful: It is perfect. It has no flaws, no wrinkles, no crinkles, no dimples, no blotches, no blemishes or brown spots! Best of all, *it will have no aches and no pain!* Revelation 21:4 says that there will be no more sorrow, no more pain, no more crying, no more dying, and no more saying, “Good bye.” Hallelujah! The love of God can reach down from the highest heaven and lift you up and seat you at the right hand of Jesus in the heavenly places!



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